

OBITUARY
Ronald Edmund Fraser Peal
(1917–1999)

Ronald Peal was born in Ealing. At the age of 17 he started his long career with the Union Discount Company of London. In the Royal Navy during the Second World War, most of his service was spent in the far east where he survived the sinking of *H.M.S. Prince of Wales* by the Japanese. An active member and one time Master of the City of London Livery Company, the Cordwainers, he was also a Vice President of Rosslyn Park F.C. A man of great faith he variously served his parish churches as Treasurer, Church Warden and as a member of his Diocesan Synod. Plate 1 shows Ronald with his wife Betty, to whom the Club conveys its most sincere sympathy, at the 20th International Ornithological Congress in New Zealand in 1990.

Ronald's interest in ornithology was lifelong. His particular interests included the birds of N.W. Morocco where he was a frequent visitor, and the history of ornithology. Papers by him appeared in a wide range of journals including *Ibis* and the *Bulletin*. Between 1964 and 1966 he conducted a national survey of Wrynecks *Jynx torquilla* for the British Trust for Ornithology. From 1981 to 1985 he served on the Council of the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU).

He particularly valued the Club. Often accompanied at meetings by Betty, he was elected to the Committee in 1969. He was the Club's Hon. Secretary for 18 years from 1971, then a low point in the Club's fortunes, Chairman from 1989 to 1993, and continued on the Committee until 1997. Supported by other long serving officers including Diana Bradley, Sir Hugh Elliott, and Dr. James Monk, he was strongly instrumental in reviving the Club's vitality. It was very appropriate that Ronald was Chairman of the Club for its Centenary Celebrations in 1992. The extent of his many contributions was recognised in 1993 when past and present members of the Committee presented him with a specially commissioned painting of a Wryneck by Robert Gillmor.

Additional to his sustained and vital influence on the life of the Club, Ronald was also deeply interested in its history and development. In the special first part of the 100th volume of the *Bulletin* (Peal 1980) he contributed a particularly informative paper on the early history of the Club and the *Bulletin*. It was a custom for the Chairman to address the Club following each Annual General Meeting but this lapsed in 1941. Ronald restored the custom in 1990, giving a typically well researched and scholarly account of the Club's history and progress in the preceding 50 years (Peal 1990). A sensitive man, he was concerned that the ornithological contributions of the Club's benefactors should be a matter of published record. Thus, in 1991 his Chairman's address was devoted to F. J. F. Barrington and Herbert Stevens (Peal 1991). In his 1992 address he examined some precedents for the formation of the Club by members of the BOU (Peal 1992) and the following year (Peal 1993) dealt with important aspects of the Club's history between 1968 and 1992 which he had not covered in his earlier presentations. An independent thinker, he understood the importance to



Plate 1. Ronald and Betty Peal at the 20th International Ornithological Congress, Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1990. (Photograph: Mrs A. M. Moore)

biological science and conservation of museums, historic collections, and continuing research into avian systematics and taxonomy. Predictably, in his address at the Club's centenary dinner on 19 November 1992 (reported in *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 113: 3–7), he expressed his genuine regret at the little importance currently attached to avian taxonomy in Britain, and described the centenary publication of the Special Centenary Volume of the *Bulletin, Avian Systematics and Taxonomy* (Monk 1992), as “an exciting development”. For the same reasons he would have been equally excited and supportive of the November 1999 conference being held jointly with the Club, Bird Life International, BOU, and Natural History Museum (Tring), *Why Museums Matter: Avian Archives in an Age of Extinction*.

In 1997 he wrote to me requesting “might the committee do all it can to secure the publication of Con Benson's list of type specimens in the museum at Cambridge”. I hope, that from another place, he rejoices at its publication this year.

Pictured in the *Bulletin* (113: 6) seated by Sir Brian Follett at the centenary dinner, he will be remembered as a good and gentle man to whom the Club owes a great deal and for which it is most grateful. During his time as Chairman he marked each Annual General Meeting with a carnation worn in his button hole. In his last Chairman's address (Peal 1993) he recalled that in 1968 he was asked if he was willing to serve as one of the Club's officers. He recorded his response, “as for me, I replied that I was not willing to take office in the Club”—explaining that the statement confirmed his experience in life: “don't trouble to volunteer for a hot seat—if it is the will of God that you shall be in it, you'll end up in it just the same”. Thank God he did, and thank you Ronald. Thank you very much indeed.

References:

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